

Arlene McGetrick and Bernie Carson
Narrators

Janet Worthington
Interviewer

Gary Worthington
Video Photography

July 28, 2006
John Day, Oregon

JW: Let's start out by talking a little bit about your background and about your contact with Kam Wah Chung and Doc Hay and Lung On. Talk about your interaction with Kam Wah Chung.

AMc: I am Arlene McGetrick and this is my Brother Bernie Carson and we are 4th generation of Grant County so we've known about Kam Wah Chung Building since we were little children. What I remember mainly is when I was very small, the only place you could get fire crackers is at Doctor Hay's place and my Dad would take me down there on the 4th of July for fire crackers, and uh, I am sure my Brother was with us but I don't remember him being with us.

B: I don't either.

AMc: Doctor Hay would always know us by our foot steps because he was blind. He would always say, "Here comes Rosco Carson and his little red headed Daughter". I can remember walking in there and it was scary to a child. There were no windows. It smelled funny to me. I was always glad to get our fire crackers and leave and I can always remember holding my Dad's hand very tightly while I was in there. Bernie, you tell about your experiences in there.

B: I went with my Grandpa Carson – Dick Carson – he bought medicine down there all the time and I would go in with him and he'd (Doc Hay) say, "Here's Dick and his shadow is with him". He'd give me, I'd get, oh, I guess you would call it salt water taffy, little bag of candy. It smelled funny in there but all the herbs and all the stuff. After he died they went through it and found lots of whiskey and lots of canceled, or checks that never been cashed, all kinds of good stuff. But, uh, that's the only thing I know about him. I think his partner owned the Tourist Garage up here on Main Street. I think Dad bought some vehicles from him but I never did know him. Doc Hay, it's been so many years ago that, it was dark in there and isn't very pleasant.

AMc: I can remember the, they cooked the medicine on our old wood stove and oh it stunk to high heaven and it tasted worse. But I can't remember what anybody took it for.

B: I don't know what it was for but they cooked it in a big kettle.

AMc: Uh-huh, it was awful stuff but it worked. Worked, cured everything. He could cure everything I guess.

B: But Grandpa Carson smoked some Green Mountain but I don't think it came from the Chinaman's. You go in the bathroom and cover his head and light this stuff and oh it would stink and it was for his asthma. I don't know whether it came from the Chinaman or not but it was in a tin deal.

JW: When you went into the building, did you go into one room or several rooms? Do you recall?

B: One room is all I can remember. Main room just inside the door.

AMc: Seemed like he was always standing in the, more or less, in the same spot as you walked in from year to year.

JW: Was he standing when you came in?

AMc: uh-huh

JW: Were there chairs in that room, or benches to sit on?

B: I don't know. I have no idea.

AMc: I can't remember either. I just really don't know.

JW: How did he proceed when you went with someone to get a treatment? Do you remember how he treated people? How he'd diagnosed them and then prescribed?

B: No, I think that they was all getting the same thing every time. All I knew is they just went in and got medicine.

AMc: But didn't they always listen to your pulse?

B: I don't know.

AMc: I am not sure of that but I remember that, but I know that I read that he diagnosed by taking your pulse.

Page 2

JW: Do you remember anything about the heat in the building? You said it was very dark but was it cold or was it warm?

B: Anytime I was there it was summer time so ...

AMc: It gave the impression of dampness because of the smell, but I don't know that it was damp, it just smelled different than your own homestead.

JW: How about the second floor? Did you ever go up to the second floor? Did anyone ever say what was up there?

AMc: No never did.

B: No

JW: You mentioned the, these rooms, these two rooms over to the far right. Those rooms had shelves?

B: Seems to me like there were shelves with lots stuff on them but I wouldn't swear to it. Seemed like I can remember him going and picking stuff off the shelf for Grandpa. But no idea.

JW: Could you describe for us what Doc Hay looked like? What do you remember about him? Was he tall, short?

B: He wasn't very tall.

JW: He wasn't very tall?

AMc: He was very slight but as far as remembering his face. I was too little. I don't remember.

B: I don't either.

AMc: I remember seeing pictures of him but actually remembering, I don't.

JW: Do you remember if he had any whiskers or?

B: I thought he did but wouldn't swear to it. I thought he had a goatee or beard, but to long ago.

AMc: I don't remember.

Page 3

JW: Do you remember anything about his hands when he was diagnosing people? He was very careful about his hands?

B: No

AMc: Seems like he always shook hands with Dad when we went in but I don't remember anything about... I really don't remember him.

JW: Do you remember him speaking? Did he speak English??

AMc: Uh-huh, yes.

JW: Did he speak it well? Were people able to understand him?

AMc: Very much of an accent but I think he spoke so – yea – I'm sure people could understand him well.

JW: Do you remember when you took your Grandpa, how did he pay for the medicines that he was given?

B: I have no idea. I'm sure it was by cash cause I don't know whether Grandpa wrote, I guess Grandpa wrote checks too.

AMc: On the freight.

B: On freight line but I am sure it must have been cash. I have no idea.

JW: Do you remember your Grandpa talking about going to the china doctor? How he felt about the doctor?

B: He liked him. He cured a lot of people that was most like blood poisoning, stuff like that.

AMc: He was a well respected man in the whole community as far as we know.

B: People from Long Creek and all over come to see him.

JW: Did he go to them??

B: I don't think so.

JW: Sometimes did he go out to see...

Page 4

B: Not that I ever knew of but then of course Lung On could have taken him but I just don't know.

AMc: I don't remember ever hearing of him making house calls.

JW: Lung On had the dealership? You said he owned the car dealership here?

B: I think it was the - called Tourist Garage up there where Len's Drug Store is. I think when I was born, I think Dad's car was in there being serviced and Dad was in IZEE and he called and they had the car ready for him when he got in on the stage and then, Carlos when with him, and they hit the cow in Cow Valley and didn't get there until two days after I was born. But he had the garage up there and I think it was called Tourist Garage.

AMc: Sounds right.

B: But I don't remember him at all.

JW: Did you hear of any other of his activities or anything else Lung On was involved with?

B: I guess he was quite a business man but I've no idea what he was into.

AMc: Everything you read says that he was quite a business man. He was the business part of Doctor Hay's business.

B: You're going back over seventy years.

JW: It's a long, long time.

AMc: It's just too bad this wasn't done earlier where, where like our Mom and Dad and Grandparents – they would have been full of information.

B: Well, and before all the stuff disappeared out of the museum after he died, too, there was a lot of stuff that disappeared before anybody got control of it.

JW: What do you think happened to it?

B: Well he left it to some relation and they had – he was a Chinese doctor, he raised his boys here, one of his boys was a dentist here. They'd go in take something out, whatever, and didn't mean anything then. There's an old wives tale about Doc Hay, why

he came to this country. He said to take his medical exam, you stuck your hand through a hole in a tarp, or a patient stuck their hand through the hole in the tarp. You felt their pulse and told en what was wrong. If you were wrong, your head came off.

AMc: uho-o-o

B: So he didn't take the examination. He just skipped and come to the United States. Well that's the story they told us. God only knows if there's anything to it or not. But that'd be a good reason to skip out.

JW: I would think so.
Do you recall when there were other buildings around Kam Wah Chung?

B: I don't

AMc: I don't either. Seemed like that kind of set there all by itself. For a long, long time was just kind of there.

JW: Was it secure while it was there? Did people get into it? Kids break into it?

B: I don't think so, I think the door was locked after he died.

AMc: Was boarded up for about twenty years after he left.

B: Was Doctor Bob?

AMc: Doctor Wah, Bob Wah, Chinese doctor, Eddie's Dad.

B: That's it, Eddie's name, trying to think of.

AMc: Eddie and Hank Wah went to school here same time we did.

B: Doctor Bob built the building where Sunshine Bed & Breakfast is. Didn't he build that house?

AMc: I think so.

B: When he got here?

JW: So, then, while he was building the house, where did he stay?

B: They didn't stay in the old place. There was four of them. He, his wife, and two boys, so I don't know where they stayed.

JW: When the museum was opened up and they went back in, did you hear about the condition of the store when they opened it up?

AMc: Well I think they had a team from the Collage come in and itemize the, and inventory everything, and that's when they found all the booze up stairs and it's still up to the Court House in Canyon City. But the last I heard there was a lot of bottles that had evaporated so they had to fix that but the booze is still up there in the Court House at Canyon. But somebody told me that it was bottled in New York City and it was the awful-lest taste'n stuff you ever drank. So somebody has tasted it along the way.

NOTE: At the time this interview, the bottles were in the Interpretive Center.

B: If it been any good, it wouldn't still be in the court house. It would have disappeared.

JW: Did you know Gordon Glass?

B & AMc: Yes, defiantly did.

JW: What was his roll in this?

AMc: Gordon was a great historian and he was, and had the S & M Motor Company, Chevrolet Dealer and he was a big instigator in getting Kam Wah Chung open again. Kam Wah Chung is on State Parks land but I, I'm going to through this out there just on a limb, because I don't know this for sure but I don't think ever, they ever, ever actually proved who owned the contents of that building. Whether it is State Parks or the City of John Day. I definitely would like to know that someday.

JW: Good question.

AMc: But Gordon was; I was Chamber Manager after Gordon and Laura moved to Arizona. He would call me periodically to say, "Has this been done and has this been done and has that land mark back up?" He was very interested in Grant County.

JW: Did you know of any other folks who were heavily involved in this preservation effort besides Gordon?

B: I don't know

Page 8

AMc: I'm trying to think and can't think of whom. Grace Williams might have been in on that board. May Jeanette Hinning might have been in on that, Hermon Oliver. I just don't know for sure who was on that board at that many years ago.

JW: Do you know of any items of the store that may have been moved out to another location? There was, I think, there were some yard sales that may have held at one point?

AMc: I certainly can't remember or know of anything.

B: I don't either.

JW: Pictures, old pictures may have. Parks Service would be interested in (hard to hear the rest of the question)

AMc: I was never aware of anything like that.

JW: Is there anything else, or are there any other stories you would like to share about Kam Wah Chung, Doc Hay or the Chinese here?

AMc: I know that I have a ring that my Grandfather dug the gold out of Canyon Mountain and a Chinese man made the ring for me. In fact I'll show it to you. This is the ring that Dick Carson, our Grandfather, dug the gold out of Canyon Mountain and had a Chinese man make the ring and it has a Chinese something inscription on the inside. You would not be able to see it. He gave this to me when I was five years old. It's very much an antique.

B: So is somebody else I know.

AMc: Takes one to know one right?

B: Right. She didn't tell ya she is my older sister.

AMc: He always does that. I'm not.

JW: Are there any other stories?

AMc: Like I told you earlier, I was riding horse back up on Canyon Mountain and came across a slope that was all rocked in where the Chinese could bring there wheel barrows down out of the mines up there. I would have loved to have had pictures of it, which I didn't have a camera with me, and I would never find it again cause it was really up high. But it was interesting to see that. They worked so hard.

B: On the middle fork there is a ditch, big creek that comes around the mountain they use for mining. It's unbelievable, unbelievable they dug that thing by hand. Sometimes it's about from here to across, four feet deep (could not understand)
Pass an cross Swamp Gulch, went for miles. They dug it for two placer mines.

AMc: It's really amazing that there was like 10,000 here and then they were just all gone. You know they were all gone when we were kids or when we remember anyway. To have that big of a population and when the gold is gone they're gone.

B: They run em out of Canyon and went to Middle Fork. They dug gold out of Big Creek over there at China Diggins. White man wasn't very good to them.

JW: Why do you thin that was??

AMc: Well, it's just the way of the world at that time. People didn't know any better, ya-know. That's just the way it was. Awful. Just to bring somebody in here to do all the hard work and not respect them is terrible.

JW: Any other stories?

AMc: We just wish we could be more helpful to you but we are kind of, like I said before we were so small that what we remember is also a lot of what people have told us through the years too. So you are never really sure of what you are remembering or what you've been told.

B: We lived in Canyon up two miles away and back in them days you wasn't in town at the time like kids that was born and raised like Bud Kirtridge.

AMc: Kids that lived in John Day probably had a better memory, but they are few and far between now.

B: Just waited too many years to do this.

AMc: So are we though.

JW: Thank you very much for were very helpful.

AMc: Thank you.